



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor Brown-Tracy and Councilor Sheets

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor O'Beirne updated the Council on the progress of the Charter Revision Committee. The Committee has reviewed the entire Charter and is reviewing a "draft draft." The Committee hopes to be able to distribute a copy of the rough draft in July with an eye toward a November referendum.

Town Manager Oefinger received notification that DOT will hold a public information meeting on Wednesday, June 18th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in Town Hall Annex CR1 on proposed I-95 safety improvements.

Councilor Schmidt was approached by a resident who thinks that the Town should stop street sweeping. Mayor Watson noted that the Town is required by statute to sweep twice a year. Next year, the Town will use an all-salt system which will cut down on street sweepings. The Town Manager urged residents who do their own sweeping not to put the material into catch basins.

Mayor Watson noted the special session tomorrow where the legislature will consider sun setting the conveyance tax.

Councilor Streeter asked that the referral on tax relief for volunteer firemen be placed on the Group I agenda for consideration.

Councilor Bond has received a number of communications regarding the reuse of Noank School for the Senior Center. The Town Manager noted the plans will be presented to the Noank Zoning Commission on June 17th.

4. Approval of Minutes

2008-0160

Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of May 28, 2008, May 29, 2008, and June 3, 2008 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2008-0154 FYE 2008 Suspense List

Discussed

Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo noted that the Tax Collector has determined that certain taxes, that have been billed numerous times, are unpaid and uncollectible. They will be removed from the active collection process, but the taxpayer is still liable for the taxes. The list is on file in Town Manager's Office.

Councilor Sheets arrived at 6:20 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Brown-Tracy

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0072 Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief - Update

Discussed

Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent provided background on this effort and the work of the Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief.

Councilor Brown-Tracy arrived at 6:25 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Councilor Bond feels strongly about providing more relief by increasing income limits for people who have lived in the Town the longest. She stated she is willing to entertain a lower cap. The legality of the five year residency requirement will have to be determined before the ordinance is written. Councilor Bond is also willing to index the interest rate.

Councilor Sheets supports a lower cap. She feels this effort is important and noted that the state has given towns a number of options. She started to comments on various aspects of the proposal, and Councilor O'Beirne suggested reviewing the document point by point rather than each Councilor making all of their comments at one time.

The following sections of the Citizen Committee proposal, as revised by Councilor Bond, were reviewed, discussed, and/or modified:

p. 6 - Maximum Annual Amount of Total Program Relief

Councilor Monteiro suggested .5% of the total adopted budget that can be adjusted by the Council periodically.

Assistant to the Town Manager Vincent noted that the statute provides a cumulative cap of 10% of the real property tax collected in any one year.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Bond, to make the maximum annual amount of total program relief .5% of the total adopted budget, and to add the statutory cumulative cap.

The motion carried 8 votes in favor, 1 opposed (Kolnaski).

p. 6 - Minimum Residency

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to retain the five-year minimum residency requirement.

The motion carried unanimously.

p. 6 - Occupancy

Councilor Monteiro asked how principal residency would be policed. The Assistant to the Town Manager noted that a federal tax return is required and will provide an objective form of proof of residency.

p. 6 - Maximum Income Limits

Councilor O'Beirne feels this is discriminatory since we live in a mobile society. He also feels the income limits are extremely high based on the 2000 Census median income figures for single persons and families. He suggested using an index of 90% of median income. The Town Manager noted that median incomes are estimated yearly by HUD so it is a viable index. He added that people retire at significantly less income and he can envision quite a few people being eligible for this program immediately under these income guidelines. Councilor Bond noted that median income is not an accurate indicator for Groton. Councilor Sheets also objects to using median income and noted this program applies only to elderly and disabled residents which further skews the calculation.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Brown-Tracy, to establish the following income limits, by years of residency:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>5-11</i>	<i>\$32,800</i>	<i>\$40,000</i>
<i>12+</i>	<i>\$50,840</i>	<i>\$62,000</i>

The motion carried 5 votes in favor, 4 opposed (Brown-Tracy, Monteiro, Kolnaski, O'Beirne).

Town Manager Oefinger indicated he will calculate how these income limits relate to the median income so that the median income can be used as an index going forward.

p. 7 - Interest Rate on Deferrals

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to establish the interest rate on deferrals as prime + 1%.

After some discussion the motion and second were withdrawn. Staff and Councilor Bond stated they would provide more information on available indexes for calculating interest rates.

p. 7 - Filing Deadline

The filing deadline will remain at May 15th

p. 7 - Aggregation Limit

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to revise this section to read "No property tax relief received by a resident under any Town tax relief program shall exceed in the aggregate the total amount of the tax which would otherwise be laid against the

taxpayer."

The motion carried unanimously.

p. 9 - Qualifying Income Basis for Applicants Filing Federal Tax Returns

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, seconded by Councilor Bond, to define income as adjusted gross income less federally qualified medical expenses, tax exempt interest, etc.

The motion carried unanimously.

Councilor O'Beirne suggested that the ordinance identify the staff position/person designated to take applications and review personal data. Councilor Streeter suggested that the Town make an effort to promote this program. Councilors thanked Councilor Bond for her work on this item.

Town Manager Oefinger distributed a memo from the Town Attorney suggesting that any

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bond, to adjourn at 8:17 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.